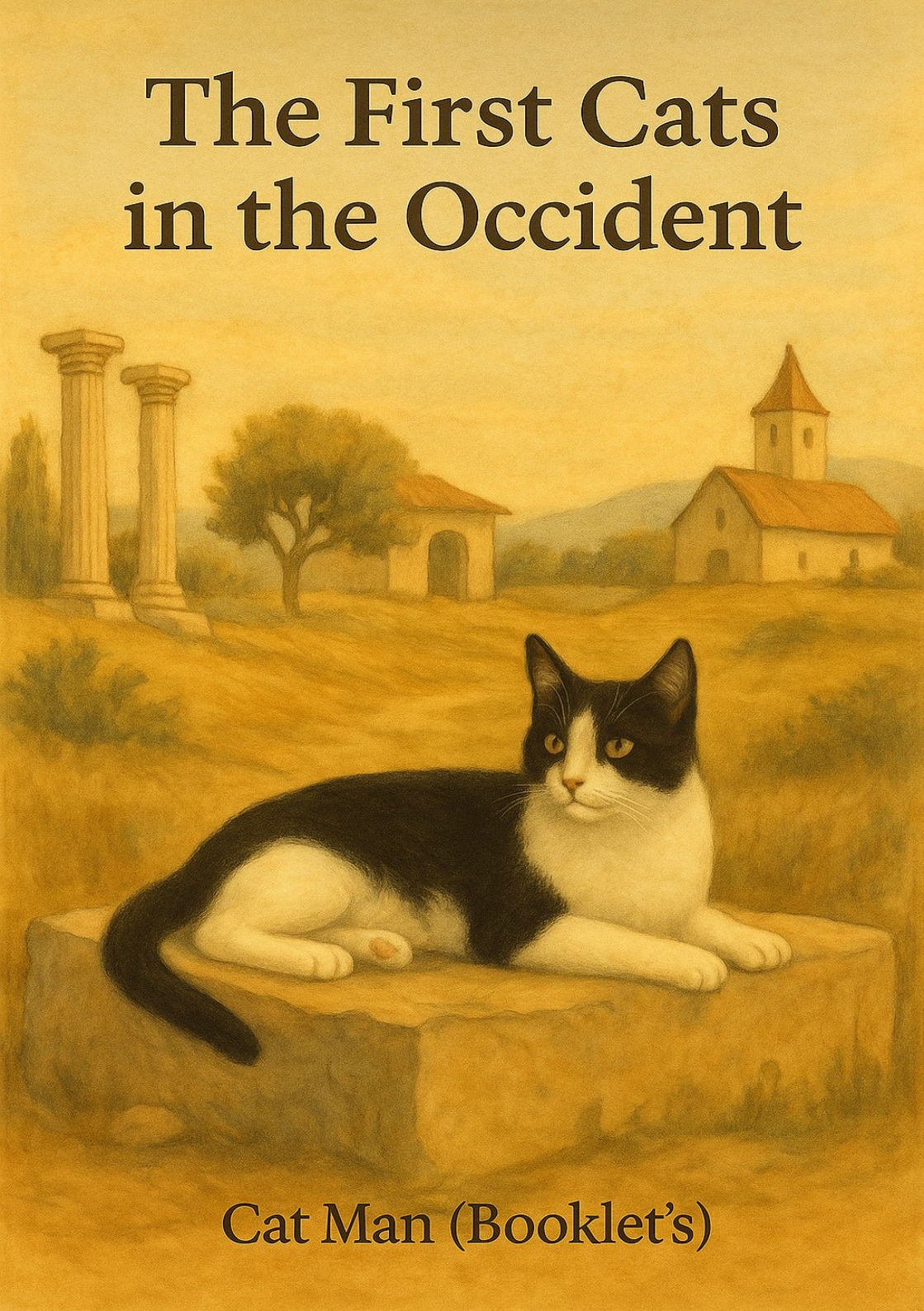
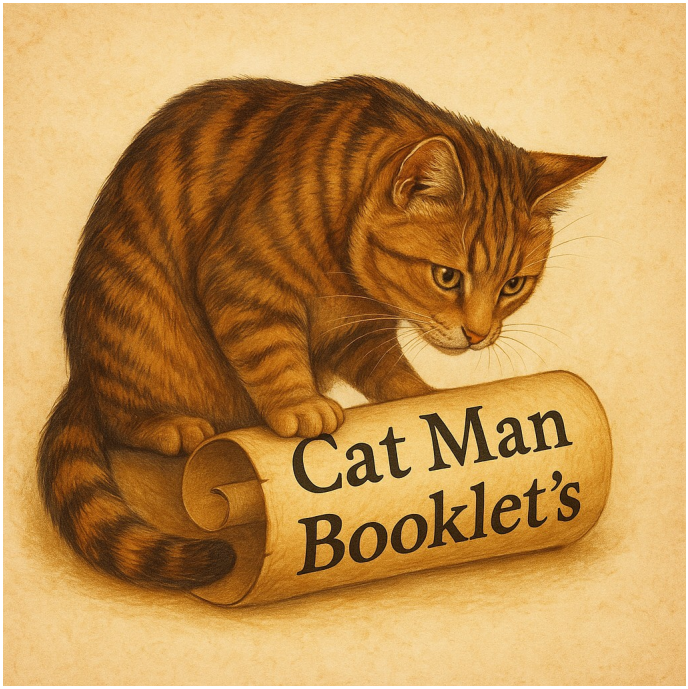
The First Cats in the Occident



Cat Man (Booklet's)



Hrsg: Cat Man (Booklet's)
Godshorn (Germany) 2025

The First Cats in the Occident

Tanto le gatte son moltiplicate,
Ch'a doppio son pitı che I'Orse nel cielo:
Gatte ci son c`han tutto bianco il pclo
Gatte nere ci son, gatte pezzate:

Gatte con coda, gatte discodate:
Una gatta con gobba di cammelo
Vorrei vedere e vestita di velo
Come bertuccia, or che non la trovate?

Guardinsi i monti pur di partorire,
Chè s'un topo nascesse, il poverello
Da. tante gatte non potria fuggire.

Massara, io t'ammonisco, abbi'l cervello
E l'occhio al lavezuol ch'è sul bollire:
Corri, ve', ch'una se'n porta il vitello.

Vo' farci il ritornello,
Perchè 'l Sonetto appieno non si loda
Se non somiglia a i gatte della coda.

(Torquato Tasso)
(Translation at the end of the text)

When Torquato Tasso wrote this poem around 1580, cats had only recently regained their prestige. Petrarch, the precursor of humanists and the Renaissance, had been one of the first to rediscover the value of cats 200 years earlier. Laura, his wife and muse, inspired him to write his poems, and later, after Laura's death, when Petrarch lived on his estate in Arqua during the summer months, a cat was his only companion. In the Middle Ages, cats had been persecuted and despised. It was not until late antiquity that they became native to European soil.

The cat is the youngest of Europe's domestic animals. Dogs already existed in the Neolithic period (approx. 6000-1800 BC), when humans gradually began to practice agriculture and settle down. This is proven by bone finds from the so-called "Kjökkenmöddinger," the Danish shell mounds. The dogs of that time were not yet true domestic animals. They lived more or less wild, but must have been quite trusting and joined humans of their own accord from time to time, especially when their stomachs were growling or when they sought the warmth of a campfire on cold nights.

However, there are no prehistoric finds of cat bones anywhere in Europe. Chickens, horses, goats, peacocks, and dogs—these animals had long been familiar to humans in Europe before anyone had ever seen a cat. And from the moment the first cat arrived in Europe, it took centuries before cats truly became native to the Western world.

A cat arrives in southern Italy

About 400 years before the birth of Christ, a Hellenic merchant who ran a large trading house in Taranto brought his wife a mysterious gift in a basket from an exhausting trip to Cyrene (in present-day Libya). He said: "The journey was tiring and the days in Cyrene were exciting.
But I have brought you a gift that will make you happy and help pass the time on some of my journeys, which I will unfortunately have to undertake again in the future.

It is gentle, beautiful, and graceful. It has soft fur and loves to be petted. And when you stroke it, it makes sounds of contentment and will be very affectionate. Yes, you can already tell from my words: it is an animal! It is not only a friendly animal, it is also a capable one. It will chase the rats and mice out of our house, at least as reliably as the weasel, which smells so disgusting that we now want to give it away. Our new animal won't stink. It is very clean and grooms itself diligently every day. I'm sure you'll like it." And he opened the basket: a small gray cat jumped out, and the woman threw her arms around her gallant husband's neck.

From then on, there were cats in the Greek colonies in southern Italy, only a few, but they were held in high esteem. Women in particular were friends with them. Excavations in Apulia have unearthed many depictions of cats from that period, especially on vases. For example, one sees a naked, voluptuous beauty sitting with a dove on her lap; a tiger cat stands on its hind legs in front of her and tries to grab the dove, but the woman fends off the cat with a friendly gesture. The same depiction also shows the cat's favorite toys: a ball and a ball of wool.

Another vase image shows a young man with a small kitten sitting on his shoulder, obviously feeling comfortable there. Coins found in Taranto and Regium show graceful cats playing as their minting.

The Greeks also occasionally took cats from southern Italy back to Greece and tried to domesticate them there. At the same time, the Greeks imported camels, and Agesilaos set up a kind of farm in the Peloponnese where he tried to breed camels. For inexplicable reasons, however, both attempts failed. Agesilaos' camels apparently missed the desert and did not want to reproduce.

And the cats did not seem to like it either. They died out again in Greece and eventually even in southern Italy. A hundred years after the first cat set foot on European soil, there were no cats left in Europe. Had the cats been mistreated? Did they dislike the southern European climate? Or had the terrible wars that ravaged southern Italy in the third century BC driven the cats away?

We don't know.

The cat had disappeared again. But people remembered the useful and trusting animal very well. This is evident in Aesop's fables, which were written between the 6th and 4th centuries BC. However, these fables paint a very contradictory picture of the cat's character. Some describe it as despotic and cunning, for example the following:

THE CAT AND THE ROOSTER

A cat, who was miserable with hunger, met a rooster. "Rooster!" she said, "You are doomed! The humans want to finally have some peace and quiet! They can no longer stand you waking them from their sweet slumber every morning at dawn—almost in the middle of the night—with your crowing." "You are mistaken, cat," replied the rooster, "the people have appointed me specifically to call them to their business in the morning. If I didn't wake them up, they would sleep through their precious time and be very angry with me." The cat, who was not prepared for this reply, said: "There is another reason reason why you must die. You are a disgusting fellow! What kind of business is this, where there are dozens of women and only one man?! Decency forbids me to say the word. And even your mother and sisters ! Fie!" But the rooster said, "Control yourself! There is no reason to insult me. Nature intended it this way, and humans want it this way too. Thanks to my efforts, they get lots of eggs. "But the cat replied, "Apologize all you want. I'm hungry!" And she ate the rooster.

"The powerful either find an excuse for their actions or they don't." That is the moral of this fable. The cat appears in a similar light in a second fable:

THE CAT INVITES GUESTS

The cat wanted to celebrate her birthday and sent invitations to her neighbors. Most of them said they

would be honored and delighted to attend. When the afternoon came, the room quickly filled with guests. Most species of birds were represented: woodpeckers, swallows, sparrows, and many songbirds, as well as hares and rabbits. Squirrels and two mice also appeared.

"Welcome, my dears!" said the cat. "This is going to be a wonderful party. I can't tell you how happy I am to have you here. Make yourselves at home!" "Thank you very much," said the guests. "But where is the entertainment?" "That's you!" said the cat, smiling. "I think you will entertain both yourselves and me."

The guests were surprised, but didn't want to upset the cat. So the birds chirped their latest songs and circled around the room, the rabbits played leapfrog, the mice played hide-and-seek, and the squirrels performed acrobatic tricks. Eventually, however, they all grew tired and gradually hungry. "And where is the food?" they asked timidly. "That's you again," said the cat, locked the door, and began to eat the guests one by one. The only thing left of the feast was a pile of feathers.

Was the cat considered a robber and thief in ancient times? It almost seems that way. A later fable by the Roman poet Babrius, who lived at the time of Christ's birth, reports:

A farmer caught a thieving cat, tied its feet together, and prepared to drown it in a barrel. "Farmer! Friend!" cried the cat desperately. "How badly you repay me for the good I have done you! Have I not tirelessly hunted mice and lizards?" "I admit that," said the farmer, "but you have also strangled all my chickens, so that the

chicken coop is now empty. Almost every day you also snuck into my meat store and stole a piece of meat."
I admit," said the farmer, "but you also strangled all my chickens, so that the chicken coop is now empty. Almost every day you also went after the meat pots, knocked them over, and stole the best pieces. You have done me far more harm than good
! Die now, on the spot and without argument!"

In fact, cats at that time did not seem to know exactly what their business was. A bat benefited from this indecision, as reported by Aesop:

THE BAT AND THE CAT

A bat fell to the ground, unfortunately right in front of a cat.
The cat grabbed it and wanted to eat it. "Spare me!" cried the bat. "How dare you?" replied the cat, "I am at war with the birds, as the gods have decreed!" "But I'm not a bird!" " cried the bat, "I'm a mouse!" So the cat let go of the bat and spared its life. A little later, however, the bat fell to the ground again, and once more there was a cat waiting to eat it. "Spare me!" cried the bat. "Never!" replied the second cat, "I am at war with all mice, as the gods have decreed!" "But I'm not a mouse!" cried the bat this time. "I'm a bird!" And once again it was set free.

The ancient Greeks and Romans called not on cats but on weasels to help them against the mice that caused damage in their fields and pantries. "There are two creatures," a mouse is said to have once told a frog, "that I fear above all else on this earth: the hawk and the weasel.

The weasel is the most terrible. It has brought unspeakable suffering upon our species. It is strong and swift and even pulls us out of our holes. We can avoid the traps set by humans, but the weasel takes us by surprise." The following fable, told by Aesop and later by the Roman poet Phaedrus, also deals with weasels as the main enemies of mice:

THE BATTLE OF THE WEASELS AND THE MICE

There was a state of war between weasels and mice, and since the mice lost one battle after another, they called a meeting to discuss ways and means of preventing the impending defeat. "The problem is," said one mouse, "that weasels are naturally superior to us." "The bigger problem is," said a second, "that we are so poorly organized." "The main mistake," remarked a third mouse, "is that our army has to fight without proper command. We lack leaders!"
Thereupon, those assembled elected several military leaders who were allowed to call themselves generals. These generals were quite proud of their position and rank and insisted on wearing medals and insignia. And so that they would be recognizable to the whole world, they also donned large gilded horns.
The next battle was fought. Once again, the weasels won, and the mice had to retreat. Most of them were happy if they could still escape to their homes. Only the generals, who wanted to follow the other mice, could not pass through the narrow mouse holes because of their crazy horns and were all caught and eaten by the weasels.

So back then, the saying was not "The cat won't let the mice go!" but "The weasel won't let the mice go!" The

Greeks seem to have regarded cats more as a source of fur. Aristophanes, the famous ancient Greek comedy writer, tells of fur traders from Boeotia who sold cat skins at the market in Athens. And another comedy writer, Anaxandrides, tells of a Greek who laughs at an Egyptian because he cares so much about cats: "When you see a cat suffering, you cry. It would be smarter to kill the cat and skin it. At least, that's what I do."
However, the abilities and usefulness of cats were not unknown at that time. In the famous fable of the city mouse and the country mouse, it is a cat that scares the two mice away from their meal:

THE CITY MOUSE AND THE COUNTRY MOUSE

One day, the country mouse invited its friend, the city mouse, to dinner and chose the best it had from its pantry: grains, barley seeds, nuts, acorns, wild berries, and tasty flower stems. The city mouse, however, turned up its nose and said, "How
can anyone eat this stuff! How can you live in such a hole! Come and visit me. I'll show you some of the pleasures and comforts of city life."
The field mouse was curious and went along with her; she was also very impressed by the size and furnishings of the city house where her friend lived. "I'll show you everything tomorrow morning," said the city mouse proudly. "But first, let's make ourselves comfortable. I'll serve you a nice feast later."
When it got dark, they quietly sneaked into the kitchen. The residents of the house had gone out, but they had left behind a sumptuous meal:
cake scraps, bacon rinds, cheese rinds, potato peels, butter, sausage casings, and wine left in the glasses. The field mouse was delighted.

Just as they were about to tuck into their feast, something terrible came towards them: the big house cat, which jumped through the door with bared teeth and sharp claws. With great difficulty, the two mice managed to escape into a crack. When the field mouse said goodbye the next morning, she said to the city mouse: "You have a beautiful home and very good food. But for my part, I prefer my dry seeds and my safe burrow."

And another Aesopian fable tells of a state of war not only between weasels and mice, but also between cats and mice:

THE CAT AND THE MICE

The mice, who were greatly troubled by a cat, held a meeting
meeting on how they could better defend themselves against their dangerous enemy. A young mouse believed she had found the solution to the problem. "If the cat wore a bell around its neck," she said, "it would ring with every step and warn us, so that we would have enough time to reach our dwellings safely."
The other mice praised this as an excellent idea—except for one, who said, "The suggestion is truly excellent. But which one of us will put the bell around the cat's neck?"

"Many a beautiful plan remains a beautiful delusion," is the moral of this fable. However, in this war between mice and cats, the mice were apparently not always the stupid ones, but seem to have succeeded in outwitting the cats from time to time in ancient Greece. "Experience is the best teacher, and deception is of no use": This is the lesson taught by the following fable:

THE MICE AND THE CAT ON THE WALL

Field mice moved into a house in the country that had been empty for a long time and soon populated every nook and cranny. A cat who heard about this also moved in and found the conditions ideal: she didn't even have to leave the house to hunt. She ate mice for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and even afternoon tea if she felt like it. The mice, whose numbers were dwindling daily, were very concerned. "Something must be done!" said one of them. "But what?" asked another. "This cat is too big to fight!" "The best attack is always defense," said the oldest of the mice. "So let's stay in our holes until the cat gets hungry and leaves."
The cat waited, but not even a mouse's whisker appeared. After three days of waiting, she resorted to a ruse: she climbed onto the garden wall, hung upside down from the branches of a tree, and made no sound. "Come out!" cried one of the young mice. "We're safe now, the cat has taken its own life." But the old mouse did not move its head half an inch out of its hole, but cried, "It's no use, cat! We don't trust you. You can do what you want, we won't come out as long as you're here."
Then the cat untied itself, climbed down, meowing angrily, and disappeared never to be seen again.

The confusing and inconsistent ideas that people in ancient times had about cats also included superstitious beliefs. The fables about the cat and the rooster and about the cat that celebrated its birthday in a manner that was not very friendly to humans or animals already assumed that cats were deceitful or even "false."

Phaedrus, the Roman successor to Aesop, even tells of a cat that was downright malicious:

THE EAGLE, THE CAT, AND THE WILD BOAR

As luck would have it, a mighty oak tree was home to three very different families: at the top of the tree, a pair of eagles had built their nest; in the middle, in a hollow, lived a cat with her kittens; and at the bottom, near the roots, a wild sow had settled with her piglets.
The cat did not like her cohabitants very much and thought about how she could drive them away. She climbed up to the eagles, acted very excited and reported: "We are in danger! It is outrageous! The sow and her clan dig in the earth every day. The ground is already very loose, the roots of our oak tree are sticking out into thin air.
Soon the tree will sway!
Will it fall and plunge us and our children into ruin?"
Confused, the eagles consulted among themselves and decided to move away and build a new nest in another oak tree. But the cat climbed down to the foot of the tree and said to the wild sow: "Oh yes! Oh dear!
How I worry about your little ones! The eagle that lives in the treetop is dangerous. He watches all day to see if you are going to the pasture, and he is ready to swoop down and steal your children away!" Worried and heavy-hearted, the wild boar hurried away and sought a dark cave for herself and her little ones. But the cat remained contentedly in the tree and enjoyed the peace and quiet.

Dio Cassius, a historian who lived shortly after the birth of Christ and wrote the biography of Emperor Tiberius, believed that a cat in the house brought bad luck.

He reports that a large crowd of well-wishers once came to visit the almighty Gejanus. They all sat down on a long sofa, which eventually collapsed under the heavy load. But then a cat shot out of the wreckage of the sofa and ran out of the house in front of Gejanus' eyes. All the guests lamented Gejanus and prophesied misfortune for him. And indeed, from that day on, things went downhill for Gejanus. He became impoverished, lost his influence, and died a miserable man.

The final arrival of the cat

Until around the time of Christ's birth, cats appeared only sporadically in Greece and Rome. It was not until the Roman Empire expanded far to the east, during the reign of Emperor Augustus, that cats became more common. Legionnaires repeatedly brought cats home with them. The first monks who moved from Egypt to Italy via Syria and Greece also often had cats with them. The hermit monks of Egypt loved cats not only for their diligence as mouse catchers, but also because they were loyal companions in their lonely hermitages, showing patience, calmness, and comfort in everything.

The cat was no longer an exotic and strange animal in the Western world. It also became at home in simple houses. The industrious female cats ensured rapid reproduction. Nevertheless, cats were still in the minority compared to weasels and domestic snakes, which were kept at that time to combat mice and rats. Nevertheless, cats were well known. People no longer had such confused ideas about them.

Pliny the Elder, who died in the destruction of Pompeii in 79 AD, aptly describes the cat of one of his patrician

friends as follows: "Cats creep very quietly and silently when they want to catch a little bird; they lie in wait for mice and suddenly pounce on them. They cover their droppings with raked earth so as not to reveal their presence to the mice."

Seneca, the famous Stoic philosopher and teacher of Emperor Nero, who forced him to commit suicide in 65 AD, was also familiar with cats and advised farmers to protect their chickens from them. "Is it a coincidence that chickens are afraid of cats and not dogs?" he asked. In general, cats still seemed to have more of a reputation as predators than as mouse hunters at that time.

Weasels and house snakes still had a monopoly on hunting mice and rats. Perhaps they left nothing for the cat, so that it had to content itself with chickens. Or were the cats of that time actually more predatory than our cats today? Or was it not the weasels themselves that killed chickens and, as long-established residents, blamed the strangers and newcomers?

The four-hundred-year war

About 200 years after the birth of Christ, total war broke out in the Roman Empire between cats, weasels, and house snakes.
The issue was who was allowed to stay in human homes and who had the prerogative to do so. The cats had multiplied diligently and formed a considerable army. The unsympathetic house snakes were on a losing battle from the start. But the weasels did not allow themselves to be displaced so easily.

Above all, they were relatively obedient. The cat, on the other hand, remained deaf to human commands. But it was affectionate and clean, did not smell, and was much less murderous. The weasels secretly killed chickens, hares, rabbits, and lambs, even kids, not because they were hungry, but simply out of a lust for murder. In contrast, the cat seemed lovable and well-behaved.

Despite the obvious advantages of cats, the battle remained undecided for a long time. It was not until the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century that cats finally gained the upper hand. Millions of house rats invaded Europe from the Middle East and southern Russia. And it was only thanks to the hard work of cats that humans were able to control these hordes.

The agricultural writer Palladius, who lived around 500 AD, gave farmers advice on how to deal with cats. He taught them how to protect artichoke plantations from moles and chickens from cats. Farmers were advised to have cats patrol the artichoke plantations all day long. If there were no cats, tame weasels would do the same job.

And if there were no weasels either, there was nothing left to do but to plug the mole holes with a mixture of clay and wild cucumber juice.

However, care must be taken to ensure that the cats do not get behind the chickens. It is therefore advisable to tie a branch of rue under each chicken's right wing – not the left! – as this will deter cats from approaching the chickens.

Palladius was also the one who called the cat "catus," a word that became "catta" in Vulgar Latin, then "gatta" in Italian, "chat" in French, and "Katze" in German. The Latin "catus" is probably related to the North African "gada" and "kadiska," so that we can trace the path taken by the cat from the history of the word:
from the Nile Valley via North Africa and Italy to the heart of Europe.

The weasel had now played its role. It was no longer welcome in the house and became a wild animal again. The Byzantine monk Theodoros Prodomus, who wrote a poem about cats, knew nothing more about the weasel as an enemy of mice.
According to his account, it is only cats that protect the city of Burgundy from mice, which come storming towards the cat fortress armed with bows and arrows.

We can also see how quickly cats had gained prestige in late Rome from the fact that in the last decades of the Western Roman Empire, dogs were to be kept away from temples, whereas cats were welcome there. This is because cats remain quiet even during sacred ceremonies. They do not bark, do not feel the need to leave evidence of their presence at every corner, and do

not bring dirt inside. In Greece, too, at least in Hellenistic times, dogs were not allowed to enter temples. The priests of Jupiter were even forbidden to mention dogs, because dogs desecrated the temples and degraded the priests.
"The dog," says Plutarch, "is by nature a gluttonous and quarrelsome animal."

The cat as a symbol

Due to its mysterious nature and behavior, the cat has always served as a symbol. The Greek philosopher Artemidorus wrote in his dream interpretations: "If you dream of a cat, it indicates adultery. Someone is pursuing your wife, just as the cat pursues birds. For like birds, women are pretty and lovely and friendly, they chatter a lot and sing gracefully, thereby attracting cats."

The association between cats and adultery remained alive throughout the Middle Ages. Later, it was customary for adulterers and adulteresses, murderers of their own wives, parents, or children to be sewn into a sack together with a cat and drowned. The last criminal to be executed in this manner was a judge from the town of Goldscheid in Saxony.

He had strangled his wife in bed and was hanged in Dresden in 1715 from the Elbe bridge together with a black cat.

Above all, however, the cat has been regarded as a symbol of freedom since ancient times. In the temple dedicated to Tiberius Gracchus in Rome, a cat lay at the feet of the goddess of freedom, dressed in white, holding a scepter in one hand and a bowl in the other. Many freedom-loving

peoples carried images of cats on their banners. "They went into battle for their freedom under the sign of the cat, as it were. The cat was the heraldic animal of the Vandals and Burgundians, the Schwyzers and Suebi. Later, the Neapolitan nobles della Gatta had a silver cat in their coat of arms, and around 1500, the owners of the famous Sessa printing house in Venice chose a cat as their printing mark: they wanted to indicate that they forbade any interference by the authorities in their activities and, in particular, that the censorship authorities had no business in their house.

The extent to which cats were symbols of freedom in ancient Rome can be seen in the hatred that many Roman emperors, especially the tyrants among them, harbored toward cats, foremost among them Caesar himself. Cats were never kept at the imperial court, but lions were. The tyrants wanted to prove that they ruled even over the strongest animals on earth, even over the king of beasts, that there was no creature in the world that was not subject to them.

The emperor Caracalla, for example, always wanted to have tame lions around him. He used to kiss his favorite lion, Acinaces, in public. Acinaces dined at the emperor's table and rested on the emperor's bed. On the day Caracalla was murdered, Acinaces is said to have tried to hold his master back: he blocked the door to the chamber, finally grabbing
him by his clothes, but Caracalla broke free and ignored the warning.

Caracalla's successor, Heliogabalus, also kept tame lions and leopards. He loved to frighten his guests by unexpectedly letting his lions and leopards rush into the

Cats in the early days of Christianity

Even the ascetic Christians, whose religion began to dominate Europe at the end of antiquity, viewed cats and their not always transparent behavior with suspicion. Cats were branded as devil animals and ghosts. No sooner had cats finally made themselves at home in Europe than the good times were already over for them. The church decreed: "Anyone who has a cat in their house or eats cat meat will be excommunicated. For cats are the sons of the devil; like him, cats see in the dark."

The only cats spared from persecution were tiger cats, whose markings on their foreheads formed a more or less distinct "M": they were considered "cats of the Madonna," and it was said that they had received this mark because the Madonna in Nazareth had kept such a cat.

Nevertheless, there was a church leader in late antiquity who was a great cat lover: Pope Gregory the Great. He lived in the second half of the 6th century and was an ascetic. He lived in seclusion and was indifferent to all the riches of the world.

His only friend and companion was a cat. He also allowed cats to be kept in monasteries, but only cats, no other animals. This made not only the brothers, who were responsible for the harvests and supplies, happy because they now had capable helpers against the rat and mouse infestation, but also the nuns, who sometimes found the solitude oppressive and were happy when they could pet a gentle animal.

One such monastery cat once knew how to cleverly obtain delicious meals: One day, the monastery cook had just prepared lunch and distributed the meat onto the plates when the bell at the gate was rung. The cook, who also served as gatekeeper, rushed outside but found no one there. When he returned to the kitchen, he noticed that the meat was missing from one plate. He thought he had miscounted and prepared a new portion. The next day, the same thing happened; after the cook had gone to the gate, another portion of meat was missing.

The following day, the cook paid close attention. To be on the safe side, he counted the pieces of meat and plates twice. At that moment, the bell rang again. When the cook returned, he counted the portions and found that another piece of meat was missing. Now the cook became suspicious. When the bell rang again at the same hour on the fourth day, the cook did not go to the gate, but stood in a corner of the kitchen and remained silent. There he saw the monastery cat jump in through the window, hop onto the sideboard, take a portion of meat, and disappear again just as quickly by the same route.

The thief had been discovered; now it was time to catch the one who always rang the bell at the right time. The next day, at the appointed hour, the cook hid near the gate and watched as the cat approached quietly, pulled the bell wire with its paw, and then hurried back to the kitchen. - Word of the cat's clever actions quickly spread throughout the monastery, and the brothers were so proud of their cat that they decided to always cook an extra portion of meat, which the animal could then fetch using its tried and tested method.

From then on, the brothers took the ringing of the bell, with which the cat announced its theft, as a sign that it was time to go to the table.

However, the monks were less pleased with the cats' nocturnal activities, as even the monastic environment did not deter them from indulging in sensual pleasures and amorous games. That is why learned monks began the first attempts at castration at that time. In the monasteries on the holy Mount Athos on the Greek peninsula of Chalkidiki, it is still forbidden to keep female cats. No female creatures of any kind are allowed to enter this mountain. There are not even chickens there, let alone female donkeys.

The legend that Jesus Christ created the cat to help St. Francis against the devil contributed to raising the cat's reputation in clerical circles:

St. Francis performed miracle after miracle, so that the devil almost burst with envy. He thought he would try to tempt the saint!
Once he entered his room, dressed like a great lord and carrying a chest full of money: "Take this, Francis," he said, "do not remain in misery any longer, but enjoy life. The path of life is strewn with
roses, why do you seek the thorns?" Francis was not deterred; he raised his hand and made the sign of the cross, and the great lord disappeared in a cloud of sulfur smoke. Later, the devil brought new temptations to arouse the saint's sensual desires. But Francis remained unmoved, like a block of wood, resorting to his usual sign of the cross, and the apparition disappeared.

But the devil was not satisfied. "Is it not possible to

invent something that will make this uncanny man lose his patience?" he cried. He created mice, which multiplied rapidly and filled the saint's room. Francis chased them away with his hands and feet. But no sooner had they left through the door than they returned through the window; and when he closed the door and window, they slipped back in through the cracks in the floor and walls. And they climbed into the saint's robe, crawled into the straw sack, nested in the basket, and it was not long before they had done their business on his shorn head. But Francis suddenly began to laugh! After a fervent prayer, Jesus Christ had created a beautiful big cat under his robe. Then Francis called out to the mice: "Stop there! I implore you! Go about your business, or you'll lose your lives!" But the mice pointed their little snouts at him as if they wanted to pierce him. So he pulled the big cat out from under his habit, and it pounced on the mice and, with the wonderful hunger it had, devoured them, two at a time if they were large, and three or four if they were small.

Francis wanted to have them all destroyed, so he plugged all the cracks in the floor and closed the windows and doors, but he was not quick enough: only one male and one female mouse managed to escape. The entire troublesome mouse population descends from these two. However, after another prayer by the saint, the tomcat also received a mate, and thus the cat population also multiplied.

Dante Alighieri, the poet of the Divine Comedy, also had a fondness for cats. He claimed that cats were extremely art-loving animals; they were among the few creatures in this world who valued the spirit higher than the stomach. Dante proved his claim by training a cat to hold the

candle with its paws while he read in the evening. Cetto, a friend of Dante's, did not quite believe this and asked to visit Dante so he could see the miracle with his own eyes. Getto arrived at the appointed hour, carrying a small basket, but Dante paid no attention to it.

The poet sat down at the table, picked up a book, and began to read, and sure enough, the cat held the candle for him!

Then Getto quietly lifted the lid of his basket: several mice jumped out. The cat immediately dropped the candle and chased after the mice. Darkness fell over the room, but the stomach had triumphed over the spirit! Dante is said to have sighed and said: "The cat won't stop hunting mice!" That is the origin of this proverb.

The Christians' aversion to cats may also have stemmed from the fact that it was supposedly a cat that seduced the Hun king Etzel, when he was still young, into worldly pursuits, leading him to later become a "scourge of God." The young Etzel once sat gloomily in the tent of his uncle Rugila and was actually determined to renounce the arduous craft of war.

"I want to become a Christian, serve God and man," he said to his uncle, "I will go to a monastery." But then a cat came in and began to play with the golden imperial orb that the Huns had captured in Byzantium. Etzel watched this game spellbound. He jumped up as if struck by lightning, swung his sword in all four directions and cried: "No! I want to play with the globe like this cat plays with the imperial orb! I want to subjugate all peoples! All tribes and countries shall lie at my feet!"

Despite all the difficulties and persecutions of the Middle Ages, cats never left the territory they had once conquered.

The poets and philosophers of the Renaissance, among them Petrarch and Tasso, restored cats to their former glory, so much so that in popular belief the cat was transformed from a devilish creature into a good spirit. This is evidenced by the story of Gagliuso in Basile's Pentamerone, a tale that is related to Ludwig Tieck's "Puss in Boots."

Gagliuso was the son of a poor man. When his father died, he said to his son: "Take the cat and remember your father! I am going to sleep!" Gagliuso took the cat and said: "What a wonderful inheritance my father has left me; I, who can barely make a living, now have to provide for two!" But when the cat heard this lament, it said, "What?! You complain about me?! You are more fortunate than you are wise, for I will make you rich!" Gagliuso was greatly comforted and stroked the cat three or four times on the back. From then on, the cat went to the riverbank every morning, caught a nice fish, and brought it to the king with the words: "Mr. Gagliuso, Your Majesty's most humble servant, sends you this fish with all due respect, although he knows that it is only a small gift for such a great lord. Nevertheless, the king always thanked him politely. After some time, he said to the cat, "I feel very indebted to Lord Gagliuso. I would like to meet him. He should come to me tomorrow morning!" In the morning, however, only the cat appeared again and said to the king: "Mr. Gagliuso sends his apologies: some of his valets ran away during the night and emptied all the cupboards and chests, leaving not a single shirt behind!"

The king immediately ordered the master of the wardrobe to send Mr. Gagliuso some suitable garments, which he did.
Two hours later, Mr. Gagliuso appeared in the palace, magnificently attired;
the king showered him with courtesies and held a banquet.
The cat skillfully led the conversation and told the king wonderful things about the wealth and possessions that belonged to Mr. Gagliuso in Lombardy, not forgetting to praise his master's virtue, wit, and sharpness of mind . "Yes!" added the cat boldly, "there would hardly be anyone more worthy of being related by marriage to a crowned head!" The king's curiosity was aroused, and he sent a delegation to inspect
of Mr. Gagliuso in Lombardy. However, the cat hurried ahead under the pretext of having to prepare everything for the well-being of his masters and called out to all the shepherds and farmers: "Hey!

A band of robbers is approaching! There is only one way to protect yourselves from their violence: say that all the land and livestock belong to Mr. Gagliuso, and no hair on your heads will be harmed!" So the king's envoys heard the name Gagliuso mentioned everywhere, and they
reported to the court about the prestige of this gentleman. So the king asked the cat to arrange a marriage between his daughter and Gagliuso. The cat ran back and forth, did his best, and bought a fine town house and a handsome estate in Lombardy with the king's daughter's dowry. The wedding could take place soon. Gagliuso suddenly found himself rich, honored, and influential, with a beautiful wife and no worries. However, the cat wanted to test her master to see if he

would be grateful for all her good deeds: so one day she lay down in the garden as if dead. "Oh, dear husband! What a misfortune! The cat is dead!" cried the woman, full of pity, although she knew nothing of what had happened. But Gagliuso replied only: "Better she dies than us! Throw her on the dung heap!" Then the cat rose up in anger and cried, "Is this your reward for all I have done for you? I will teach you a lesson!" Outraged, she ran to the king to tell him the story, exclaiming repeatedly,

"God protect us from the high and mighty who have fallen,
and all the beggars who have risen."

No less philanthropic was the cat of a merchant in Messina: in 1783, the animal suddenly wanted to go out the door at any cost, through the streets of the city to the gate and into the open field. But it did not take a step without making sure that its master was following, and when he stopped, the cat tugged at his legs and seemed to be completely out of its mind. When the master and cat were outside the city, a terrible rumbling sounded from the earth. An earthquake shook the area; towers, gates, churches, and houses, the entire city fell to rubble and ashes before the merchant's eyes!

The Italians rewarded the cats for these and other good deeds with praise and honor! Domenico Scarlatti wrote a cat fugue, the theme of which was inspired by his cat running across the keys of the piano; and Giacomo Rossini composed a "cat duet."
Even today, Rome's many cats live off the care and voluntary charity of cat lovers. In addition to the many

domestic cats, there are about 140,000 stray cats in modern Rome, living in the numerous historical ruins or in public parks near the markets. They are considered a tourist attraction, and "visiting" them is part of the city tour program. These cats live exclusively on the generosity of the Romans, especially the Roman women. Hundreds of elderly women collect food scraps from grocery stores every day and feed them to the stray cats.

For a long time, every lunchtime at the ruins of the Temple of Venus and Roma near the Colosseum, you could see an old lady bringing dozens of cats their favorite food, neatly packaged for each one individually. Difficult times for Rome's cats are the cold days that occur almost every winter. Then many of their feeders cannot go out, and the cats have to go hungry.

Strangely enough, a difference has recently emerged between the cats of Italy and those of Greece and Yugoslavia. The borderline between the two species runs roughly north-south through the Istrian peninsula, east of Trieste. Eastern European cats bear little resemblance to the ribbon-adorned kittens of the West. They have a completely different shape: larger ears, proportionally as large as those of bats, and a longer torso, neck, and tail.

They are more alert, smarter, and more adventurous, but above all wilder and definitely more dissolute. They have the worst reputation in Istanbul, which is teeming with them. After dark, these elegant but gloomy streets seem to move and ripple in the lantern light, an illusion created by the comings and goings of thousands of cats, sometimes alone, sometimes in small groups, sneaking around with questionable intentions.

Many of them have the appearance of down-and-out veterans—broken noses, torn ears, a "black" eye, frayed tails that they carry proudly like long rapiers in worn sheaths.

The relationship that today's Greeks and Turks have with cats is rather cool. Cats, even young ones, are simply left to their fate. Everywhere in Greece is teeming with stray cats. Greek cats are therefore not very trusting. They cautiously avoid you.

Even if you put out treats for them, they wait at a safe distance and only approach once you have withdrawn. They are not fond of being stroked and played with. If you manage to outwit a cat and touch it with your hand, it will flinch as if struck by an electric shock and jump away. The cats of Athens, like the citizens of this city, are particularly intelligent and thirsty for knowledge. Patrik L. Fermor writes about this in his book on Greece:

"Shortly after the war, I used to have my dinner in one of the open-air restaurants in Plaka. One end of the garden was separated from an open-air cinema by a high wall, and every evening a mighty black-and-white tomcat would strut across the tiles and then, with his back to us, sit down on this wall, alert and motionless, only his tail swaying slowly and rhythmically from side to side. After exactly five minutes, he would jump away again over the rooftops. What the waiter had to say about this was obviously true. "He comes every evening to watch Mickey Mouse," he explained. "You could set your watch by him."

Greek ships often have cats on board. Patrick L. Fermor reports: "I have twice seen an important departure delayed until the ship's cat had been found among the

rubbish and fish bones on the quay. A story told to me by my old friend Tanty Rodokanaki suggests that their presence must sometimes be attributed to more sober reasons than mere cat-loving. A captain, horrified by the many rats on his ship, once summoned a priest and asked him to perform a blessing specifically effective against this vermin. The priest did so, and then incensed and sprinkled the ship from bow to stern.

He pocketed the usual fee and assured the captain that he would no longer have to suffer from the rat infestation, for the rite had never failed. "But one thing is important," he added.
"What, Reverend?" The priest bowed his bearded head and whispered in the sailor's ear: "Get yourself a cat." Since then, in seafaring circles, the phrase "get yourself a cat" has meant "be absolutely sure."
'be absolutely sure.'

Torquato Tasso
(Overacting Alice Vollenweíder)

The cats have multiplied so much
that they are twice as numerous as the stars in the sky.
There are cats with completely white fur,
There are black cats, spotted cats:

Cats with tails, tailless cats:
A cat with a camel's hump
I would like to see dressed up in veils
Like a half-ape; can you still recognize it?

The mountains may be wary of giving birth,
For if a mouse were born, the poor thing,
It could not flee from the many cats.

Housewife, I admonish you, keep your head
And keep an eye on the pot where it's boiling:
Hurry up, look, someone is already stealing your veal.

I want to make a refrain,
Because the sonnet does not deserve much praise,
If it does not resemble cats with tails.

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Original text from the work
"Mau Mao Miau – The Cat Through the Millennia"
by Mischa Damjan and Rudolf Schilling,
published in 1969 by Eugen Diederichs Verlag

For your notes

For your notes

Cat Man (Booklet's)